

CHAPTER

8

Presidential Leadership, Public Opinion, and the Coming of World War II: The USS *Greer* Incident, September 4, 1941

* THE PROBLEM *

At 11:50 A.M. on Thursday, September 4, 1941, crewmen aboard the destroyer USS *Greer* sighted the track of a torpedo that had been fired at the ship, ultimately passing about two hundred yards astern of the United States naval vessel. The *Greer* counterattacked, dropping eight depth charges in an effort to destroy the submarine. At 11:58, a second torpedo track was sighted; this torpedo also missed the ship. For the next six hours, the *Greer* chased the submarine, dropping eleven more depth charges, apparently to no effect. At 6:40 P.M., the American destroyer gave up the search and proceeded to Iceland, its original destination.¹

1. The USS *Greer* was approximately 125 miles southwest of Reykjavik, Iceland, when the incident took place. The ship was carrying mail to United States Marines stationed in Iceland. The ship, built in 1918, was relegated

On September 11, President Franklin D. Roosevelt went on the radio in one of his famous "fireside chats."² Characterizing Germany's submarines as the "rattlesnakes of the Atlantic," the president told listeners that the *Greer* had been attacked without warning while the destroyer was "proceeding on a legitimate mission" and said that thenceforth he would order American ships to shoot on sight any German submarines; moreover, American ships would protect merchant ships of all nations that were

to the "bone yard" of the Philadelphia Navy Yard sometime after World War I but was recommissioned in 1940. It was named for Rear Admiral James A. Greer (1833-1904), a Civil War veteran (Union) and commander of the European Squadron from 1887 to 1889.

2. The fireside chat was scheduled to be delivered earlier but was postponed when the president's mother died over the weekend.

Germany, France and Great Britain had watched with increasing alarm as Germany reoccupied the Rhineland in March 1936, seized and annexed Austria in March 1938, and demanded the Sudetenland (the German-speaking part of Czechoslovakia). At a conference in Munich that took place on September 29-30, 1938, Hitler promised that the Sudetenland was "the last territorial claim which I have to make in Europe." Naively believing that Hitler's appetite had been satiated, Britain's prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, announced that the Munich Conference had brought "peace in our time." But in March 1939, Hitler absorbed the rest of Czechoslovakia. Realizing their error, France and Great Britain declared war when Germany invaded Poland.

Less than two weeks after the attack on Poland, President Roosevelt called Congress into special session to lift the United States' embargo on arms trade with countries at war. The Neutrality Act of 1939 lifted the embargo but mandated that such trade could be carried out only on a cash-and-carry basis (thereby prohibiting any loans to the belligerents, believing that such loans had been a principal cause of America's involvement in World War I)⁴ and forbid American troops to enter danger zones in the Atlantic.

The outbreak of war in Europe presented the American people with a dilemma. On the one hand, an over-

whelming majority wanted the United States to stay out of the war. Disillusioned by the dashing of their World War I idealism, both the American people and their government had been staunchly isolationist throughout the 1920s and much of the 1930s. On the other hand, most Americans were decidedly unneutral, hoping that the Allied Powers would be able to defeat Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union.⁵ This was especially true after the German blitzkrieg (lightning war) in the spring of 1940. In six weeks, German armies overran Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and France (which capitulated on June 22, 1940), leaving Great Britain to stand alone against the German military might. In the summer and fall of 1940, Hitler unleashed the Luftwaffe (the German air force) against Britain in hopes that massive bombing of civilian targets would force the British to surrender. Tens of thousands of British civilians were killed or wounded, the city of Coventry was completely destroyed, and large parts of London lay in ruins (with twenty thousand killed in that city alone), but the British tenaciously hung on. "We will never surrender," promised Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Gradually the Royal Air Force gained control of the skies over Great Britain.

In late June 1940, 86 percent of Americans surveyed believed the United States should stay out of the war, but the bombing of Britain had a

4. In late October 1939, 68 percent of Americans surveyed believed that it had been a mistake for the United States to have entered World War I. See Gallup, *Gallup Poll*, Vol. I, p. 189.

5. Prior to his attack on Poland, Hitler had signed the Non-Aggression Pact with the Soviet Union. While Germany was smashing the Polish army, the Soviet Union gobbled up eastern Poland.

except as we take strong measures to save it."⁷

As it had been in the past, public opinion was contradictory. In May 1941, 79 percent of those surveyed believed the United States should stay out of the war, yet in that same poll, 52 percent said that the United States Navy should guard ships carrying war materiel to Britain. Prior to the poll's being taken, Roosevelt ordered Admiral Ernest King to patrol waters as far as longitude 25 degrees west and inform British convoys of lurking German submarines.⁸ Then in June 1941, Roosevelt ordered Admiral Stark to send United States Marines to occupy Iceland, a possession of Denmark that had been occupied by British troops when Denmark was swallowed in Hitler's blitzkrieg.⁹ Thus the United

States Navy in essence was escorting British convoys to an island well within the war zone. With the navy short of officers, the United States Naval Academy had graduated its 1941 class six months early. Lieutenant Commander Laurence H. Frost had been on the USS *Greer* thirty-five days when the incident with the German submarine took place.

As a reminder, your task in this chapter is to arrange the randomly sorted evidence in order to answer the following two questions:

1. What *actually happened* in the *Greer* incident of September 4, 1941?
2. Was President Roosevelt *shaping* public opinion, *following* it, or doing a combination of both?

* THE METHOD *

In most cases, historians find it best to arrange the evidence at their disposal in chronological order. This is especially true when a historian is combining a series of events to tell a story (a narrative history) or is writing a biography of an individual (a biographical history). At first glance, then, it would

seem most appropriate to arrange your evidence chronologically.

And yet, at second glance, certain interesting problems arise. For example, the deck log of the USS *Greer* (Source 12) was written by United States Navy Lieutenant T. H. Copeman on the same day on which the incident took place, or very soon after. U-boat 652's report (Source 13) also was written on September 4, 1941. The speech by Senator Robert A. Taft (Source 23), however, was delivered to the Senate on October 28, 1941. And Roosevelt's fireside chat of September 11, 1941 (Source 20), and Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox's address to the American Legion on September 15, 1941 (Source 21), were delivered sev-

7. Stark to Admiral Husband S. Kimmel, April 4, 1941, quoted in Patrick Abbazia, *Mr. Roosevelt's Navy: The Private War of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet, 1939-1942* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1975), p. 153.

8. One joke Admiral King's men told about him was that "while [King] did not yet think he was God, God thought that he was Admiral King." *Ibid.*, p. 134.

9. Iceland's prime minister, Hermann Jonasson, was not informed of the United States' impending occupation until the marines were already at sea.

* THE EVIDENCE *

Sources 1 through 11 from George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971* (New York: Random House, 1972), Vol. I, pp. 270, 275-276, 279-280, 291, 296, 299-302.

1. Gallup Poll, Released March 21, 1941.

EUROPEAN WAR

Interviewing Date 3/9-14/41
Survey #232-K

If you were asked to vote on the question of the United States entering the war against Germany and Italy, how would you vote—to go into the war, or to stay out of the war?

Go in	17%
Stay out	83

The Southern states show the highest vote for war, 20%, and the West Central states the lowest, 14%.

2. Gallup Poll, Released April 23, 1941.

EUROPEAN WAR

Interviewing Date 4/10-15/41
Survey #234-K

Should the United States navy be used to guard ships carrying war materials to Britain?

Yes	41%
No	50
No opinion	9

3. Gallup Poll, Released May 16, 1941.

EUROPEAN WAR

Interviewing Date 5/8-13/41
Survey #236-K

If you were asked to vote today on the question of the United States entering the war against Germany and Italy, how would you vote—to go into the war or to stay out of the war?

Go in	21%
Stay out	79

Five per cent expressed no opinion.

5. Gallup Poll, Released July 25, 1941.

ICELAND

Interviewing Date 7/11-16/41
Survey #241-K

Do you approve or disapprove of the Government's action in taking over the defense of Iceland?

Approve	61%
Disapprove	17
No opinion	22

6. Gallup Poll, Released September 23, 1941.

EUROPEAN WAR

Interviewing Date 8/21-26/41
Survey #245-K

Do you think the American navy should be used to convoy ships carrying war materials to England?

Yes	52%
No	39
No opinion	9

7. Gallup Poll, Released September 26, 1941.

EUROPEAN WAR

Interviewing Date 9/19-24/41
Survey #248-K

Do you approve or disapprove of having the United States shoot at German submarines or warships on sight?

Approve	56%
Disapprove	34

10. Gallup Poll, Released October 8, 1941.

PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT

Interviewing Date 9/19-24/41
Survey #248-K

So far as you personally are concerned, do you think President Roosevelt has gone too far in his policies of helping Britain, or not far enough?

Too far	27%
About right	57
Not far enough	16

11. Gallup Poll, Released October 19, 1941.

NEUTRALITY

Interviewing Date 10/9-14/41
Survey #250-K

Should the Neutrality Act be changed to permit American ships to be armed?

Yes	72%
No	21
No opinion	7

Should the Neutrality Act be changed to permit American merchant ships with American crews to carry war materials to England?

Yes	46%
No	40
No opinion	14

Source 12 from National Archives, Record Group 45, p. 528.

12. Deck Log, Lieutenant T. H. Copeman, USS *Greer*, September 4, 1941.

4 to 8. 0400¹⁰ Changed course to 056 T, 057 PGC, 092 PSC at standard speed 17.5 knots. 0430 Went to General Quarters.¹¹ 0503 Secured from General Quarters. 0538 Shifted steering control to after steering station.

10. The armed services mark the time of day from 0001 hours (1 minute after midnight) to 2359 hours (1 minute until midnight), not repeating the hours (1, 2, 3, and so on) after noon. Therefore, 0400 is 4:00 A.M., and 1535 (below) is 3:35 P.M.

11. *General Quarters* refers to a full battle alert.

Source 13 from National Archives, Record Item T1022, Rolls 3387-3388.
Translated by Christiane M. Hunley.

13. Report of U-652 (German submarine), September 4, 1941.¹²

Time	Occurrences
445	Remained Stopped
445-725	Diving Test
909	Diving alert because of aircraft in 80 degrees, has 2 motors, very high, but close Because the crew is tired from the night before, and I do not wish to be surprised once again (the Warrant Officer is of the opinion that we are still undiscovered), I remain underwater
1200	I made the mistake and did not go on a different course
1230	I want to go to periscope depth, but when I have reached 28 meters [from the surface] suddenly at 1230 there fall 3 bombs. I remain at first at a depth of 25 meters and then go to periscope depth. Perhaps I have an oil trace and, therefore, I want to get away as soon as possible.
1300	
1322	Without being heard, a destroyer with 4 chimneys lies in a distance of 1200 meters. Position bow to the right 5-10, apparently stopped.
1328	Course 200 degrees, depth 30 meters. Destroyer is of the same type as in the convoy on 8/25 and 8/26/1941, one of the 50 American vessels that are now sailing for England.
1417	Thus, this is in fact the destroyer which released what were in fact [the three] water bombs at 1230. However, I still cannot explain its silent approach. I want to distance myself as soon as possible from this sinister companion.
1420	Have gone to periscope depth. Nothing heard on the hydrophone. The enemy should be at the elapsed distance, if he had remained stopped and stayed at his old location. Instead, he is in a position directly behind me. . . . I can now only believe that I can be heard exactly in his hydrophone and that he follows me with the most frugal turns in such a way that I cannot hear him in the aft sector. Even his backup machines cannot be heard. A plane is flying in the lowest altitude over the destroyer, apparently a large plane. I now must assume that the plane did see me this morning and that it has ordered the destroyer to this location. However, I still do not understand his tentative behavior. I must assume that he wants to slowly starve me [of oxygen], because I cannot count on surfacing unnoticed in the clear visibility of night. Also, he probably can keep this distance, if he succeeded so far.

12. At the conclusion of World War II, all German U-boat records fell into Allied hands and were deposited in the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

President Roosevelt, it was learned, was at once apprised of the incident, but there was no immediate comment from the White House. A spokesman for the State Department said that it was a question for the Navy and that he was not authorized to make any statement.

The Navy reported the attack as follows:

"The U. S. S. Destroyer Greer, en route to Iceland with mail, reported this morning that a submarine had attacked her by firing torpedoes which missed their mark.

"The Greer immediately counter-attacked with depth charges. Results are not known."

The attacking submarine was assumed to be German.

The destroyer was operating as a part of the Atlantic patrol which was established by President Roosevelt early in the Summer. At that time the White House stated that the duties of the patrol were to report to the Navy Department the presence of any potentially hostile craft.

In addition to being the first attack on an American warship in the European war the incident is the first of a warlike nature since American forces took over occupation of Iceland at the invitation of the Icelandic government early in the Summer. . . .

Source 15 from *New York Times*, September 6, 1941.

15. Additional News Concerning the *Greer* Incident, 1941.

REYKJAVIK, Iceland, Sept. 5—The men of the United States destroyer Greer, which was attacked by a submarine on the way to Iceland, said on their arrival here today that the Greer's depth charges might well have sunk the undersea vessel.

The incident was described here as a German attack.

The Greer's officers and crew expressed the conviction that they had at least damaged the submarine, for their instruments indicated that they were directly above her when they dropped their bombs.

The destroyer was in very deep water at the time, they added, and thus the submarine may have been sunk without trace.

The American warship was assisted in repelling the attack by British aircraft, they said. Those in the vicinity cooperated in reconnaissance. . . .

destroyers not only to report the location of German U-Boats and other German craft as violating neutrality but also to proceed to attack them.

Roosevelt there is endeavoring with all the means at his disposal to provoke incidents for the purpose of baiting the American people into the war.

Source 19 from Samuel I. Rosenman, *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), Vol. X, pp. 374-377.

19. FDR Press Conference, September 5, 1941.¹⁴

THE PRESIDENT. You will all be asking about the attack of yesterday, so we might as well clear that up first.

There is nothing to add, except that there was more than one attack, and that it occurred in daylight, and it occurred definitely on the American side of the ocean. This time there is nothing more to add except two thoughts I have. I heard one or two broadcasters this morning, and I read a few things that have been said by people in Washington, which reminded me of a—perhaps we might call it an allegory.

Once upon a time, at a place where I was living, there were some school children living out in the country who were on their way to school, and somebody undisclosed fired a number of shots at them from the bushes. The father of the children took the position that there wasn't anything to do about it—search the bushes, and take any other steps—because the children hadn't been hit. I don't think that's a bad illustration, in regard to the position of some people this morning.

The destroyer—it is a very, very fortunate thing that the destroyer was not hit in these attacks. And I think that is all that can be said on the subject today.

Q. Mr. President, there is one thing that occurred to me, and I wondered if you could clear that up: Was the identification of our ship solely by that little flag astern, or were there other ships going with this destroyer? Were there larger ships that made identification much easier?

THE PRESIDENT. She was alone at the time, clearly marked. Of course an identification number was on her, plus the flag. And the fact remains that, as I said before, there was more than one attack.

Q. Mr. President, does that mean more than one torpedo, or—

14. Roosevelt delighted in holding press conferences, and this was his 767th since taking office in March 1933. He averaged about two per week.

Our destroyer, at the time, was in waters which the government of the United States had declared to be waters of self-defense—surrounding outposts of American protection in the Atlantic. . . .

The United States destroyer, when attacked, was proceeding on a legitimate mission.

If the destroyer was visible to the submarine when the torpedo was fired, then the attack was a deliberate attempt by the Nazis to sink a clearly identified American warship. On the other hand, if the submarine was beneath the surface of the sea and, with the aid of its listening devices, fired in the direction of the sound of the American destroyer without even taking the trouble to learn its identity—as the official German communiqué would indicate—then the attack was even more outrageous. For it indicates a policy of indiscriminate violence against any vessel sailing the seas—belligerent or nonbelligerent.

This was piracy—piracy legally and morally. It was not the first nor the last act of piracy which the Nazi government has committed against the American flag in this war. For attack has followed attack. . . .

[Here Roosevelt listed other attacks and threats, including the sinking of the three U.S. merchant ships, one of them flying the Panamanian flag.]

It would be unworthy of a great nation to exaggerate an isolated incident, or to become inflamed by some one act of violence. But it would be inexcusable folly to minimize such incidents in the face of evidence which makes it clear that the incident is not isolated, but is part of a general plan.

The important truth is that these acts of international lawlessness are a manifestation of a design, a design that has been made clear to the American people for a long time. It is the Nazi design to abolish the freedom of the seas, and to acquire absolute control and domination of these seas for themselves.

For with control of the seas in their own hands, the way can obviously become clear for their next step—domination of the United States, domination of the Western Hemisphere by force of arms. Under Nazi control of the seas, no merchant ship of the United States or of any other American republic would be free to carry on any peaceful commerce, except by the condescending grace of this foreign and tyrannical power. The Atlantic Ocean which has been, and which should always be, a free and friendly highway for us would then become a deadly menace to the commerce of the United States, to the coasts of the United States, and even to the inland cities of the United States.

ships—not only American ships but ships of any flag—engaged in commerce in our defensive waters. They will protect them from submarines; they will protect them from surface raiders. . . .

My obligation as president is historic; it is clear. Yes, it is inescapable.

It is no act of war on our part when we decide to protect the seas that are vital to American defense. The aggression is not ours. Ours is solely defense.

But let this warning be clear. From now on, if German or Italian vessels of war enter the waters, the protection of which is necessary for American defense, they do so at their own peril.

The orders which I have given as commander in chief of the United States Army and Navy are to carry out that policy—at once.

The sole responsibility rests upon Germany. There will be no shooting unless Germany continues to seek it.

That is my obvious duty in this crisis. That is the clear right of this sovereign nation. This is the only step possible, if we would keep tight the wall of defense which we are pledged to maintain around this Western Hemisphere.

I have no illusions about the gravity of this step. I have not taken it hurriedly or lightly. It is the result of months and months of constant thought and anxiety and prayer. In the protection of your nation and mine it cannot be avoided.

The American people have faced other grave crises in their history—with American courage, with American resolution. They will do no less today.

They know the actualities of the attacks upon us. They know the necessities of a bold defense against these attacks. They know that the times call for clear heads and fearless hearts.

And with that inner strength that comes to a free people conscious of their duty, conscious of the righteousness of what they do, they will—with divine help and guidance—stand their ground against this latest assault upon their democracy, their sovereignty, and their freedom.

Source 21 from *New York Times*, September 16, 1941.

21. Excerpts from a Speech by Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox to the American Legion Convention, September 15, 1941.

. . . A German submarine encountered an American destroyer engaged in carrying mail to our outpost on Iceland. The encounter came in broad

Acting on the information from the British plane the *Greer* proceeded to search for the submarine and at 09:20 she located the submarine directly ahead by her underwater sound equipment. The *Greer* proceeded then to trail the submarine and broadcasted the submarine's position. This action taken by the *Greer* was in accordance with her orders, that is, to give out information but not to attack.

The *Greer* maintained this contact until about 12:48. During this period (3 hours 28 minutes) the *Greer* maneuvered so as to keep the submarine ahead.

At 12:40 the submarine changed course and closed the *Greer*.

The disturbance of the surface and the change in color of the water marking the passage of the submarine was clearly distinguished by the *Greer*.

At 12:48 an impulse bubble (indicating the discharge of a torpedo by the submarine) was sighted close aboard the *Greer*.

At 12:49 a torpedo track was sighted crossing the wake of the ship from starboard to port, distant about 100 yards astern.

At 12:56 the *Greer* attacked the submarine with a pattern of eight depth charges.

At 12:58 a second torpedo track was sighted on the starboard bow of the *Greer*, distant about 500 yards. The *Greer* avoided this torpedo.

At this time the *Greer* lost sound contact with the submarine.

At 13:00 the *Greer* started searching for the submarine and at 15:12 in latitude 62-43 N., longitude 27-22 W., the *Greer* made underwater contact with a submarine. The *Greer* attacked immediately with depth charges.

In neither of the *Greer*'s attacks did she observe any results which would indicate that the attacks on the submarine had been effective.

The *Greer* continued search until 18:40, at which time she again proceeded toward her destination, Iceland.

From the above it is clearly evident that the *Greer*, though continuously in contact with the submarine for 3 hours 28 minutes, did not attack the submarine although the *Greer* herself was exposed to attack.

At no time did the *Greer* sight the submarine's periscope.

The weather was good.

The commander-in-chief of the Atlantic Fleet corroborates the above report in detail and further states that the action taken by the *Greer* was correct in every particular in accordance with her existing orders.

H. R. Stark

QUESTION 5. Was the commanding officer of the *Greer* informed that a submarine was operating in this vicinity before his vessel was attacked or before the submarine or her periscope was seen? If so, when and from whom did he receive this information?

ANSWER. Yes. See answer to preceding question. The periscope of the submarine was not seen at any time by the *Greer*.

QUESTION 6. If he had information from an outside source that there was a submarine in the vicinity, (a) did he change his course and speed and start a search for the submarine; (b) how long did he search for the submarine before he was fired upon; and (c) did other vessels or planes assist in this search?

ANSWER. As soon as information was received by the *Greer* from the British plane that a submarine was directly ahead of her, the *Greer* increased speed, started zigzagging, and commenced a search for the submarine. Five minutes after the search began, namely, at 09:20, the *Greer* located the submarine by her underwater sound equipment; she held this contact until 12:48, namely, 3 hours 28 minutes before the submarine made her attack. No assistance by either planes or ships was given to the *Greer* during this period.

QUESTION 7. If he first learned of the presence of the submarine from his submarine detection device or from sighting it, (a) did he change his course to search for or head for the submarine; or (b) would he have been out of range of the submarine's torpedoes if he had continued on his course?

ANSWER. The first part of this question is answered by the answer to the preceding question. As to the second part of this question, the answer is problematical. No person can predict what the submarine's course would have been. The answer, therefore, might be "Yes" or it might be "No."

QUESTION 8. How many torpedoes were fired at the *Greer* and at what intervals were they fired? How long was it after the submarine was sighted or first heard that the first torpedoes were fired? How near did the torpedoes come to hitting the ship?

ANSWER. Two torpedoes were fired at the *Greer*. The firing of the first one was indicated by the sighting of the impulse bubble at 12:48, just 3 hours and 28 minutes after the *Greer* first detected the submarine by means of her sound equipment. At 12:49 the wake of this torpedo was observed about 100 yards astern. At 12:58 the wake of a second torpedo was observed 500 yards distant on the starboard bow. The *Greer* avoided it, the torpedo passing about 300 yards clear of the ship.

QUESTION 9. How many depth charges were dropped by the *Greer* and at what intervals?

way as deliberately to incite the American people. No man who sincerely desired peace would have failed to state the actual circumstances. . . .

Mr. President, I may say that convoying was proposed last spring, but there was so much opposition to convoys that authority to convoy never was specifically presented to Congress. Apparently without such presentation we now have the United States engaging in convoying. But the point I wanted to make is that the whole intention of the administration, every indication that a reasonable man can draw from its acts, is that it intends to go into war; and certainly, if we pass this resolution, and the administration has such an intention, we are going very shortly to become involved in war.

There is no argument made today that, after all, we are already at war, and therefore we should not hesitate to go on and vote authority to conduct war. The power to declare war rests solely in the United States Congress. If the President can declare or create an undeclared naval war beyond our power to act upon, the Constitution might just as well be abolished. The Constitution deliberately gave to the representatives of the people the power to declare war, to pass on the question of war and peace, because that was something which kings had always done, which they had done against the interests of the people themselves, and which the founders of the Constitution thought the people ought to determine. It is true there have been one or two acts of war; but if Congress will refuse to repeal the Neutrality Act, I do not believe those acts of war can be continued. . . .

* QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER *

Almost immediately you will see that you will have to rearrange the evidence *twice*: once to answer the first question (What *actually happened* in the *Greer* incident of September 4, 1941?) and a second time to answer the second question (What was the relationship between President Roosevelt's actions and American public opinion?). Although at first you may feel that rearranging the evidence twice will be too time-consuming, in fact it should save you a great amount of time, principally because several pieces of evidence may be set aside

when answering either of the two questions (for example, Sources 1 through 11 are of no use in answering the first question).

To determine what actually happened in the *Greer* incident, Sources 12 through 23 all have a bearing. And yet a number of these accounts are at serious variance with one another. Lieutenant T. H. Copeman, who composed the *Greer's* deck log, and the author of U-652's report obviously were the two sources closest to the incident itself. Do those two accounts (Sources 12 and 13) vary in any sig-

brary or a nearby library) will prove helpful.

Finally, it is important to know when the results of a poll were released as well as when that particular poll was taken because respondents often are influenced by what other people think regarding a particular issue or question. They might actually change their minds once they see the results of an earlier poll.

As you examine and analyze the principal events of 1941 and know how they might have been reflected in the public opinion polls, pay special attention to President Roosevelt's actions and speeches. Can you establish whether Roosevelt was shaping public

opinion (therefore ahead of it), was waiting for shifts in public opinion before taking action, or both—sometimes leading and sometimes following? How were his remarks about the *Greer* incident (Sources 19 and 20) perhaps intended to shape public opinion? Or did the polls (especially Sources 4 through 6) allow the president to detect an important shift in public opinion that would make his policy shift announced in the September 11 fireside chat acceptable to Americans? See Source 7, a poll taken after the fireside chat. Was Roosevelt shaping public opinion, following it, or doing both?

* EPILOGUE *

President Roosevelt's policy shift of September 11, 1941 (escorting convoys of Lend-Lease goods and shooting on sight German submarines), clearly put the United States on a collision course with the Third Reich. It was only a matter of time before a United States naval vessel would be hit by a U-boat torpedo. On October 16-17, 1941, the USS *Kearny*, speeding to the aid of a convoy that was under attack, dropped depth charges into the water and almost immediately was hit by a German torpedo. The *Kearny* limped to port under escort. Then, on the night of October 30-31, 1941, the USS *Reuben James* was sunk by a torpedo while escorting a convoy west of Iceland, with a loss of 115 American sailors. Americans were outraged, and public opinion decidedly shifted against Germany. Congress amended

the Neutrality Act to allow American ships to take Lend-Lease supplies to Britain. Clearly the United States had abandoned its neutral posture. And yet, because the vote in the House of Representatives to extend the draft had passed by only one vote and because Hitler wanted no diversions from his life-and-death struggle against the Soviet Union,¹⁶ no actual declaration of war came from either side. Nevertheless, a shooting war had begun in the Atlantic.

And yet as Americans concentrated their attention on the nation's slipping into war in Europe, it was United States-Japanese relations that ultimately brought the United States into

16. After signing the Non-Aggression Pact with Stalin, on June 22, 1941, Hitler attacked the Soviet Union in what was known as Operation Barbarossa.